



Tanjavar
Brhadīśvara
temple

The Monument and
the Living Tradition

IGNCA

The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), established in the memory of Smt. Indira Gandhi, in 1987, is an autonomous institution encompassing the study and experience of all the arts -- each form with its own integrity, yet within a dimension of mutual inter-dependence, inter-relatedness with nature, the social structure and cosmology.

This view of the arts, integrated with and essential to the large matrix of human culture, is predicated upon Smt. Gandhi's recognition of the role of the arts as essential to the 'integral quality of a person, at home with himself and society.' It partakes of the holistic world-view so forcefully articulated throughout the Indian tradition and emphasized by modern Indian leaders, especially Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore.

The IGNCA's view of the arts encompasses a wide area of studies, such as creative and critical literature, written and oral; the visual arts, ranging from architecture, sculpture, painting and graphics to general material culture; photography and film; the performing arts of music, dance and theatre in their broadest connotation; and all else in festivals, fairs and in lifestyles that has an artistic dimension. It is in the Centre's agenda to explore, study and revive the dialogue between India and her neighbours, especially in the South and South East Asia, in areas pertaining to the arts.

Today, the centre is one of the important institutions that hold archival materials; books, slides, microfilms, microfiche and video documentations. Besides, it has published over 150 titles.

Under the Regional studies programme (*Ksetra Sampada*), two projects were conceptualised, one on Vraja and another on Tanjavur. Project on Vraja was completed with multiple monographs indicating the different aspects of the region. Second project on Tanjavur is focused on areas in and around Tanjavur; a strong hold of Tamil culture and *Brihadisvara*, which served as centre for many socio-political-cultural and spiritual movements over a period of many centuries.

The Cultural Informatics Laboratory (CIL), a Multimedia Research Centre was established in IGNCA with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) multimedia documentation project titled "Strengthening National Facility for Interactive Multimedia Documentation of Cultural Resources". The project included the funding for purchase of state of the art infrastructure, hiring of national and international experts and salary of project officials employed for its execution.

Through the modern multimedia technology, IGNCA demonstrates the manner in which cultural heritage can be recreated virtually, so as to present and communicate the holistic vision of India. This enabled the IGNCA to bring together scholarship and technology for facilitating communication in a modern world. Serving as the end-point in the assembly line of the IGNCA's activities, the contents developed by CIL are presented to the world through multimedia CDs/DVDs. The millennia-old (traditional) systems of knowledge of India's past and vigorous present, is captured in this lab in a computer-generated multimedia.

The IGNCA initiated five very complex multimedia programs. These are :

1. Bṛhadīśvara Temple
2. Devanārāyaṇa: An Oral Epic of Rajasthan
3. Agnicayana: A Vedic Ritual
4. Gīta Govinda: The Painting, the Music, the Dance, and
5. Viśvarūpa: A Cosmic Form of Lord Viṣṇu

The following interactive multimedia CDs/DVDs have also been released:

1. Mukteśvara Temple: A Twelfth-century Temple at Caudadanapura in North Karnataka
2. Rock Art: The Oldest Legacy of Mankind
3. Ajantā: A World Heritage Site from Maharashtra
4. Two Pilgrims: The Life and Works of Elizabeth Sass & Elizabeth Brunners
5. Devadāsī Murai: Remembering Devadāsīs, and
6. Man and Mask

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BRHADĪŚVARA TEMPLE PROJECT

The Bṛhadīśvara temple built by Rājaraṇja Cōḷa in 1010 CE, is acclaimed as the finest achievement of Cōḷa art and architecture. On account of its distinct form and beauty it has been inscribed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Monument. Its artistic excellence lies in the perfect balance of the parts and the whole, the architecture, sculpture, painting, the stone and the bronze images, the idols within, the reliefs without. The inscriptions on the walls of the temple provide a vast corpus of information at the level of economic, social, cultural, organizational and administrative patterns and structures. The temple has attracted the attention of archaeologists, epigraphists, literary critics, musicians, dancers, craft specialists, sociologists and anthropologists. Despite this interest and excellent work done by the individual scholars and institutions, most of the studies have so far been unidimensional, focusing attention on one particular fragment or part and not the whole.



Bṛhadīśvara temple - Main Vimāna

The Centre has initiated, under Kṣetra saṁapadā (Regional studies programme), an in-depth study of Bṛhadīśvara temple, to comprehend the multi-layered and

multi-dimensional aspects of a temple in its physical, Delhi and Gangotri forms and layout. The symbiosis of experts from the subjects extending from the archaeology, architecture, epigraphy, Sanskrit, temple rituals, photography and computer science on one platform, was the greatest challenge of the project. Collaboration with institutions (National and International) and individuals (Indian and foreign) having expertise in executing similar projects, was another.

Such a project couldn't have been completed without active collaboration of institutions, scholars and experts of different aspects (disciplines).

In this project, an extensive documentation has been done in and around Tanjavur, Tamil Nadu. These include:

1. Architectural survey and measured drawings by Pierre Pichard, UNESCO Expert, Southeast Asian Architecture, in collaboration with Ecole Francoise D'extreme Orient, Pondichery
2. Photographic documentation by Francoise L'Hernault of Ecole Francoise D'extreme Orient, Pondichery
3. Stampages of inscriptions in Tanjavur temple, which have been never looked before, by K. V. Ramesh, Director (Epigraphy), Archaeological Survey of India.
4. Colour Photographic documentation of Saraswati Mahal Library, Tanjavur by V. K. Rajamani.
5. Colour photographic documentation of Tanjavur paintings by Benoy K. Behl.
6. The most difficult work of the entire audio-visual was the documentation of Kumbhābhišekam, which is held once in 12 years. This was done under the supervision of Late Manna Shrinivasan.

The Project also includes the study and coordination by Dr. R. Nagaswamy, Advisor, UNDP documentation project for Tanjavur Br̥hadīśvara temple, for the following interrelated modules:

- (a) Inscriptional and epigraphic records
- (b) Architectural and photographic records
- (c) Study of texts
- (d) Iconographical study of sculptures, reliefs, bronze images and paintings
- (e) Vāstu and Śilpa aspects of living tradition of rituals
- (f) Survey and documentation of music and dance traditions and
- (g) Study of Socio-political history of the temple

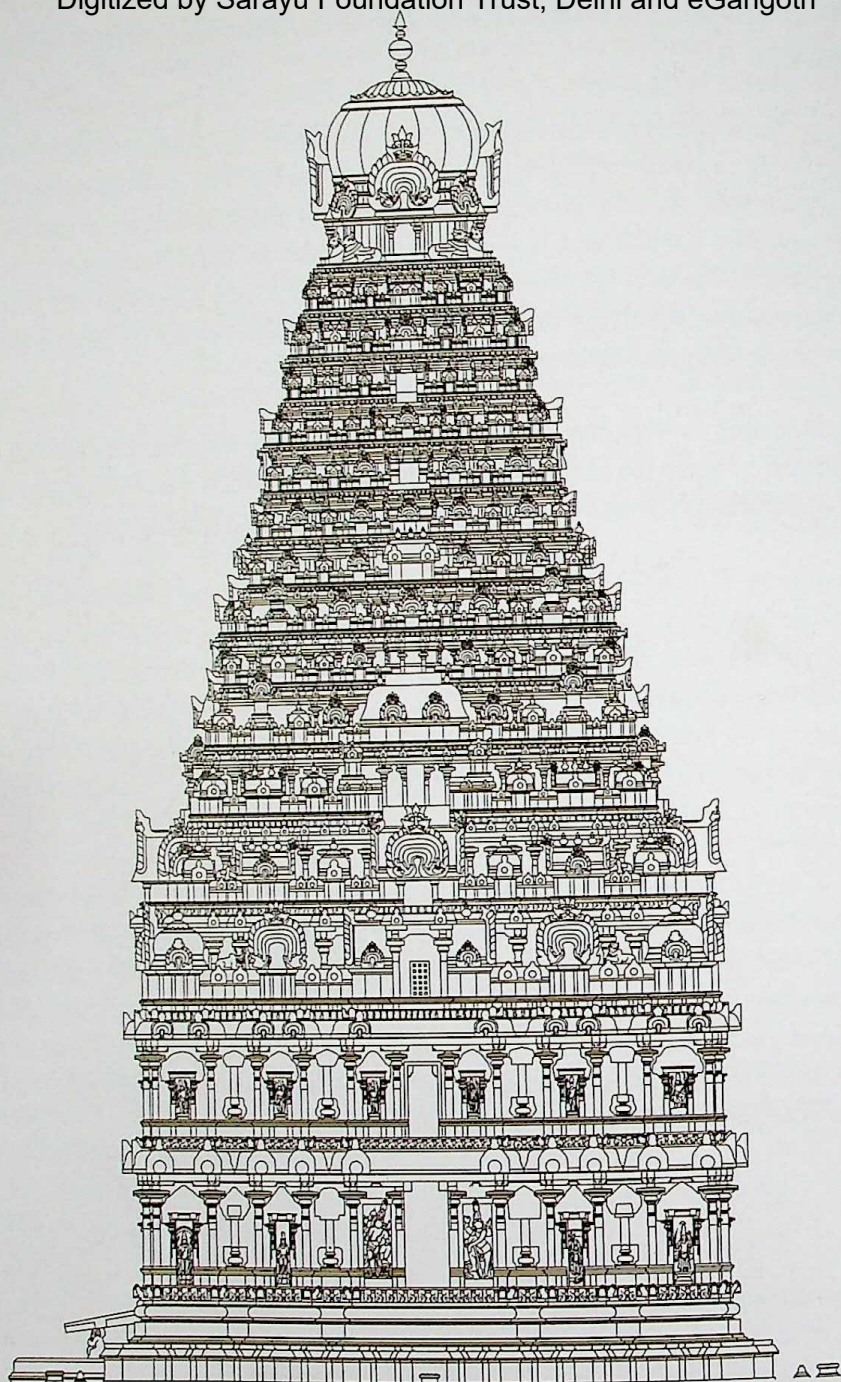
The project presents the Bṛhadiśvara temple as a monument but more as a living tradition.

So far, three major monographs namely *Tanjavur Brihadisvara- An Architectural Study*, *Brihadisvara Temple - form and meaning* and *The Iconography of Brihadisvara Temple*, have been published by the IGNCA, as a part of the project. The IGNCA also organised major events in Tamil Nadu (Chennai and Tanjavur). These events are enthusiastically acclaimed as unique and unusual presentations, revolving around the temple and the culture of its region, the people, craftsmen, implements and music and dance.

Finally, this is the first time, such a project has been conceptualised and fulfilled, to make the ancient knowledge and achievements accessible through a sophisticated multimedia platform, for the understanding of our past.

This project couldn't have been conceived by anyone else except for a scholar like Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, who is known internationally for her multi-disciplinary work through her writings, organization of exhibitions and others. Over these decades she has coordinated and supervised the execution of this project with meticulous care and commitment. Path breaking exhibitions were held in India and abroad, not to speak of first at IGNCA i.e. Concept of Space, Concept of Time, Ākāra and others.

Dr. R. Nagaswamy, former Director, Department of Archaeology, Government of Tamil Nadu is the Chief Coordinator of the Brihadisvara documentation project. He is recognized today as the most outstanding scholar of Tamil architecture, epigraphy, sculptures (specially Chola Bronzes), paintings, music and dance, besides masterly command related to textual sources. He is the author of nearly 40 books. He is widely travelled in India and abroad. He is known for richness of content and also his mode of communication.

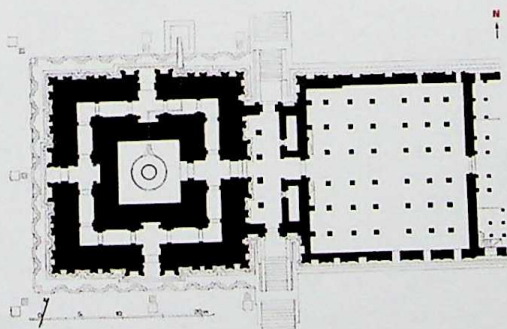


Bṛhadiśvara temple - Sanctuary-tower, west elevation

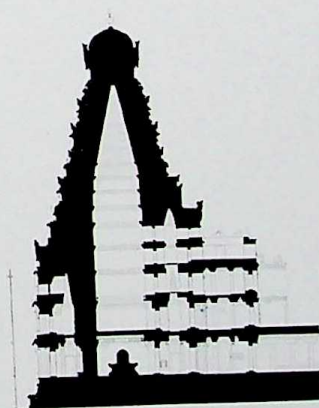
The Bṛhadīśvara temple at Tanjavur is unanimously regarded as the greatest masterpiece of Cōḷa art and architecture. This is in regards its plan for which there is neither antecedents nor successors. Long after the construction of the initial layout by the Cōḷas, works were undertaken by the subsequent Pāṇḍyās, Nāyakas and Marāṭhās, which to a considerable extent respected the initial plan.

The Bṛhadīśvara temple is organized on a linear plan corresponding to the design which was already prevalent at that period. Around the sanctuary tower in front of the long and low hall, the enclosure describes a spacious rectangular courtyard extending from east to west and accessible by gateways which determine the centre of the eastern face. The major axis defined by this gateway and the main shrine coincides exactly with the symmetrical axis of the enclosure. Several structures constructed subsequent to the Cōḷa period have modified the character of the courtyard. Inside the enclosure, only the small Caṇḍikēśvara shrine, belong to the original design. Later, until the 19th century, several structures were added.

The scale of the architectural layout exceeds significantly that of the large temples built more than two centuries earlier. The builders of this temple, despite little experience of raising high vimānas, could successfully develop the technical expertise to achieve solutions. They also incorporated the architectural and decorative elements already developed in temples.



Sanctuary-tower, plan of ground floor



Sanctuary-tower

गुप्तकालीन मूर्ति, हज़ारगाँव, लखनऊ



SADĀNRTTA MŪRTI

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ICONOGRAPHY

The temple of Bṛhadīśvara includes a great number of iconographic representations. The most original feature, never emulated elsewhere in the same way, is the sculptural rendering of two intertwined concepts: the pañca brahmā and the paramānanda tāṇḍava.

The most important icon in the temple is the huge Liṅga, the main symbolic object of worship which represents the supreme light of knowledge. It is to worship the Supreme God in this Liṅga that this entire temple was built. The measurement of the Liṅga is based on a scale derived from the middle finger of its builder. Because of the large size of the Liṅga, a system of scaffolding allows the priests access to the summit of the Liṅga to perform ablutions.

The builder of this temple Rājarāja was influenced by the concept of the golden Mērū Mountain. The images of deities enshrined in the niches on the walls and the sanctuary-towers of the structure are the manifestation of the circles of smaller peaks that went around the main Mērū in which other Gods and



LINGA

Goddess took their abodes. Some sculptures on the sanctuary-tower, on the gateway or on the stairways were never finished, showing that the work was probably entrusted to different teams of sculptors.

An interesting innovation is the architectural-iconographical vase pilaster called Kumbha Pañjara. The use of Kumbha Pañjaras in structures was unknown in Tamil Nadu before Tanjavur. Kumbha Pañjara is an architectural embellishment on the main wall, in between the koṣṭhas, in the sunken face of the wall. It represents a vase at the bottom, a pilaster, and an ornamental pañjara, with overflowing creepers on either side. This is a bold recreation from an old motif which became the norm for the following centuries.

All the figures of brick and lime mortar which cover the aedicule of the tower are subsequent of the Cōḷa period. The four cardinal niches at the summit of the tower all contain an identical seated Śiva, now covered in lime mortar.



ANANTA



MAHĀKĀLA

The paintings in the great temple of Tanjavur can be dated as belonging to three different historical periods, namely: Cōḷa, Nāyaka and Marāṭhā.

The main sanctum of the Bṛhadiśvara temple complex is so constructed that it is surrounded by two walls: an outer and an inner wall, separated by a 1.88 meters wide inner ambulatory passageway. On either walls of the dark and narrow passageway are found exquisite paintings. These paintings were discovered in the 1930's and were dated as belonging to the Nāyaka period. A closer inspection, however, revealed that the walls of the passageway consisted of not one but two layers of paintings belonging to two different historical periods. The original 11th century Cōḷa paintings were superimposed by the later Nāyaka paintings; the second layer had been performed without removing the original layer.

The paintings in the passageway of the Bṛhadiśvara temple are the only remaining examples of Cōḷa paintings that we have today. It is apparent from the lines, bodily postures and the expressions on the face in the Cōḷa paintings that the artists were equally skilled in handling both human forms and nature.



Cōḷa painting, Sundaramūrti, bay 7, inner wall, middle panel, right position

There is a vast difference between the Cōla and Nāyaka paintings both in the technique and color scheme. While in the Cōla paintings, the pigments have been integrated into the plaster, the Nāyaka artists painted over the plastered surface. As a result the Nāyaka paintings have started to peel off from the wall surface.

Marāṭhā paintings are seen in the two subsidiary shrines: Amman shrine and Subrahmaṇya shrine; Enclosure walls and Nandi Maṇḍapa. Many of these paintings were commissioned by Serfoji II in 1802-03.



Cōla painting, Chidambaram Naṭarāja, bay 10, south-east wall



Cōḷa painting, Sundaramūrti, bay 7, inner wall, middle panel, right position



Cōḷa painting, Sundaramūrti, bay 7, inner wall, middle panel, right position

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On the base of the main tower, the front great hall, the subsidiary shrines and the enclosure are remarkable documents that record several aspects of the temple: its construction, maintenance and management, land grants. The light these records throw on the rituals and festivals conducted in the Bṛhadīśvara Temple is also significant.

One record mentions Rājarāja Peruntaccan as the chief architect who, assisted by two more artisans, designed and built the temple. The record also furnishes in detail, the transfer of 400 accomplished dancing girls to this temple from well known temples of Tamil Nadu. The record also mentions the appointment of over two hundred and fifty musicians and the performance of a Dance-drama on the construction of the temple.

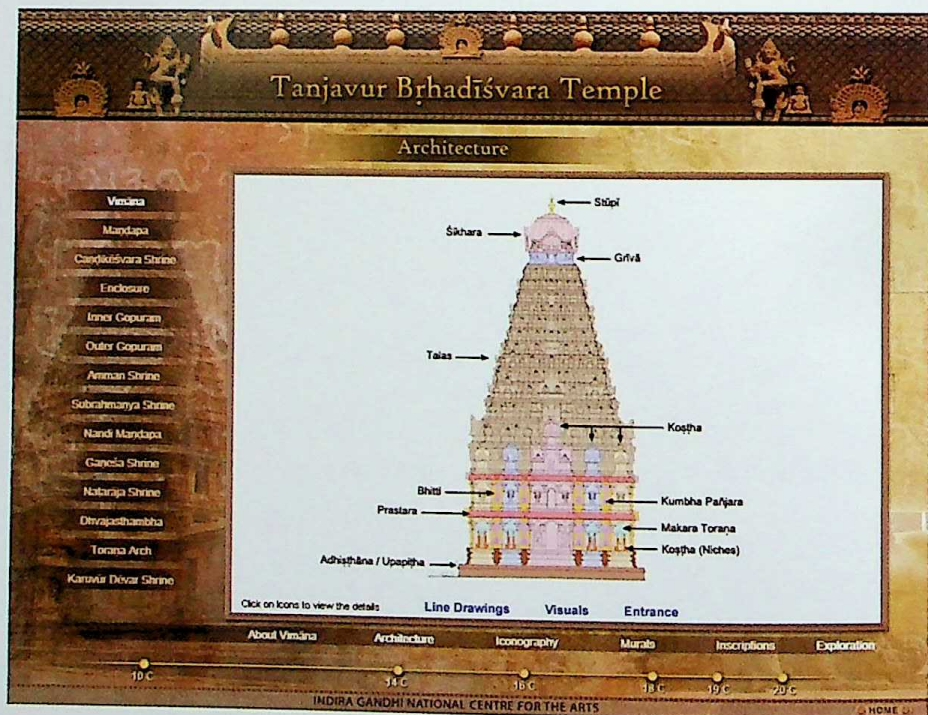
There are also records that speak of the bronze images consecrated, about the jewels gifted, the total number of precious gems and quantity of gold used in each one of them. The metal images include some rare images like Dakṣiṇāmūrti, Liṅgodbhava, Pañca-deha mūrti, besides Naṭarāja, Kalyāṇasundara, Candraśekhara etc. They also tell us that in the sub-shrines in the enclosure are enshrined the images of Dikpālas and secondary deities or the Parivāradevatās.



Inscription on the north and west walls, upper tier

This interactive multimedia DVD presents the content explanation systems on the Bṛhadīśvara temple to intensify cultural learning and visualisation. Through this DVD users can access the sections of the architectural layout, both horizontally and vertically with respective images and little description about each section.

The temple of Bṛhadīśvara includes a great number of iconographic representations. The most important icon in the temple is the huge Liṅga, the main symbolic object of worship. Distribution of sculptures on the ground and upper floors of the *Vimāna* with description of each of these icons, their reference in the text(s) (through *Dhyan shloka*) and voiceover of the *Dhyan shloka* in some cases has been integrated for a better understanding. On the upper floor of the Central sanctum, sculptures are carved on the outside of the inner wall of the *Vimāna* in a clock-wise direction. They represent the dance-karaṇās as described in the Bharata's *Natyashastra*. 108 stone blocks were left to carve all the dance-karaṇās as per the text but, the work stopped after the 81st



Several alterations and additions in structures, do reflect the growth, with time, and this has been shown with the timeline in this DVD. Recent techniques and tools have been utilized to integrate the information available in different art forms in an interactive manner for easy navigation by the users. 360 degree panoramic views of the temple from selected locations, are provided for the users.

This is the first time when such a project has been conceptualised and fulfilled, to make the ancient knowledge and achievements accessible through a modern multimedia platform, for the understanding of our past.



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